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Bennett D. Sorensen
Lakeridge High School

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SENATOR DODD VERSUS THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION:
PASSING THE GUN CONTROL ACT OF 1968

Bennett D. Sorensen

Dr. Karen E. Hoppes
History 202: History of the United States
Portland State University

SENATOR DODD VERSUS THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION: PASSING THE GUN CONTROL ACT OF 1968

On November 22, 1963, two shots came from a rifle that killed the President of the United States. The assassination of President Kennedy brought the issue of gun control into the country where it had not been an issue for decades. The public reaction was full of angry sentiment in reaction to the President's death. Two opposing forces appeared: Senator Thomas J. Dodd from Connecticut versus the most powerful gun-lobbying group, the National Rifle Association. The next five years of proposing gun control legislation landed in stalemate for the majority of the time period. As the public opinion swayed politicians into favoring Dodd's bill, the National Rifle Association made amendments to the Dodd Bill. The bill's passing was seen as a victory for gun control in response to accumulating political assassinations, but the key secret was the National Rifle Association's ability to amend and shortcut the original Dodd Bill into a less effective piece of gun control legislation.

Founded in 1871 by a union soldier named William Conant Church, the National Rifle Association began as a method to better train soldiers in their marksmanship. "The purpose of the NRA was—in Church's words—to turn 'the Guard into sharpshooters.'"¹ Through progressive changes in gun control laws, the National Rifle Association changed over time from a gun marksmanship organization to a gun lobbying organization. In

¹ Osha Gray Davidson, *Under Fire: The NRA and the Battle For Gun Control* (Iowa City: University Press, 1998), 22.

1958, the objectives of the National Rifle Association were “Firearms Safety Education, Marksmanship Training, [and] Shooting For Recreation.”² Then, the organization turned to protecting the 2nd Amendment right: “a well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, should not be infringed.” But this transformation did not occur in a matter of years, it occurred several decades after the inception of the National Rifle Association.

In reaction to President Kennedy’s shooting, the key player on the other side of the debate for more gun control in the United States was Senator Thomas J. Dodd from Connecticut. Before he became the early leader for gun control, Dodd had an important career including participating in an unsuccessful capture of John Dillinger, prosecuting the Ku Klux Klan, and serving as a lawyer for the Espionage Act of 1917. But the focus of his career was as a Senator, where among another things, he sought gun control. In the process, he produced a vicious fight against the gun lobby in the United States in order to pass a bill that became the most important national gun legislation in America since the National Firearms Act.

Following the Kennedy assassination, the general public proved to be in favor in a change in the law. A Gallup Poll in January 1964 found that “78% of Americans were in favor of law which would require a person to obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun.”³ These reports scared the National Rifle Association who reacted to gun control propositions all over America. In Oregon, the National Rifle Association

² Ibid, 29.

³ George Gallup, “Permit Law Wins Favor For Possession of Guns,” *The Sunday Oregonian*, CXXXII: 8 (January 19, 1964), 14.

quickly opposed a bill proposal as “prohibit[ing] carrying loaded guns in vehicles during hunting season.”⁴ The National Rifle Association fought these kinds of laws in order to prevent momentum to rise in passing gun control legislation around the United States.

The worst fear of the NRA was further national gun control, which was demonstrated in Dodd’s all-encompassing bill. His deliberate goal focused on the amount of trading, moving, and transportation of firearms that occurred in the United States; one of these primarily being the restriction to mail-order guns, directly regarding Lee Harvey Oswald’s gun purchase under a false identity and Kennedy’s Assassination. In response to the assassination, the public immediately joined this gun control movement.

Even though this movement began to grow as the assassination riled up the political motivations of Americans, the motivation of the public did not match the power of the National Rifle Association. When Senator Dodd proposed action to provide control over purchasing weapons, he denounced his opponents who were “a ‘small but loud and well organized hardcore minority,’ and said there were ‘almost hysterical attempts’ to kill the bill.”⁵ As a minority in the debate, The National Rifle Association defiantly defended their anti-legislation stance. The predilection for gun control of the American people kept the issue in the news, discussions, and in national debate, although it became more and more irrelevant as Kennedy’s assassination faded into a distant past.

⁴ Al Den Beste, “Bill Outlines Gun Control,” *The Sunday Oregonian*, LXXXII: 13 (February 23, 1964), 5.

⁵ “Surplus Red Arms Flooding the U.S., Senator Dodd Says,” *The New York Times*, CXIII: 38,919 (August 14, 1964), 2.

An interesting byproduct of publicity in the gun control debate was NRA membership. Following the Kennedy assassination, the National Rifle Association doubled its size. Just in the 1960s decade alone, the NRA went from having roughly “300,000 members in 1960 to having 1,000,000 members in 1970.”⁶ The seeming threats to gun rights spurred gun owners into membership. Even though the majority of this increase in NRA membership was due to the support by gun enthusiasts to go against gun control legislation, within the National Rifle Association splits formed over their approach to the debate. There were varying amounts on which parts to support or not support so they decided to simply discourage any legislation for the sake of consensus as an organization of varying perspectives.

Although not very significant in comparison to the National Rifle Association, a movement by gun control supporters formed behind Dodd to promote new gun legislation in the United States. These weren’t giant organizations or conglomerates. The gun control supporters that actually participated in public promotion of gun control consisted of grass roots movements of small amounts of people. Through advertisements that would say something akin to “Your senator is next”, these supporters tried to sway and maintain pro-gun control opinion.

Another contributor to this anti-gun movement was news reports that kept the political debate in the headlines. They did not inherently take specific sides, but their editorials and opinion pieces furthered the discussion. One example of typical anti-gun piece in the newspaper was in the *Oregonian*, titled “Murder in the Mail” which

⁶ Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA’s Culture War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 39.

demonstrated how easy it was to get a gun using examples like “a 15-year-old boy in Baltimore [who] used a .38 caliber foreign revolver to murder his mother, father, and younger sister” which he bought for only \$16.95.⁷ These provocative stories and writing did not constitute a major harm for the NRA; however, they weren’t entirely helpful either because they kept the gun debate going, the biggest weakness to prevent legislative change. With more debate surrounding the Dodd Bill, the leaders of the National Rifle Association deviated slightly on and off on some parts of gun legislation. Under pressure from both the public opinion and their members, they flipped between accepting and denying pieces of the legislation.

Even though Kennedy was assassinated and people fought over gun control, the two opposing forces did not appear so black-and-white. By early 1965, the gun control issue had broadly collected into the two sides represented by Dodd and NRA. Within each side, there were minute differences in their policy for gun legislation, but overall they were either with Dodd or with the National Rifle Association. In basic appearance, Dodd’s bill appeared to be a passable bill because of “expected support of the Johnson Administration for firearms control legislation and the compliant attitude of the overwhelmingly Democratic congress are major factors.”⁸

Congress held hearings on an early form of Dodd’s bill in May, 1965. The law, in its current form, limited interstate trade and provided guidelines surrounding the

⁷ Jerome Wilson, “Murder in the Mail,” *The Oregonian*, LXXXIX: 18 (April 3, 1966), 175.

⁸ Ben A. Franklin, “Gun-Curbs Issue Revived By Dodd: Prospects for Control Over Mail Orders Held Good,” *The New York Times*, CXIV: 39,074 (January 17, 1965), 59.

transportation of these weapons from dealers and manufacturers. The overwhelming reason why the bill did not pass through Congress was due to the “intense opposition among sportmen...Leading the opposition...has been the National Rifle Association, speaking for the approximately 700,000 recreational shooting measures.”⁹ Even though President Johnson endorsed the bill, it did not pass Congress.

Even after the NRA beat this version of Dodd’s bill, publicized stories of the flawed gun system appeared again and again in the news. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach said, “Cities with stringent firearms laws have a substantially lower homicide rate than those where the gun traffic is relatively unrestricted.”¹⁰ One example of the mail-ordering flaws happened in New Jersey where an anti-tank rifle had been “confiscated from three youths, who paid \$90 for it” from a catalogue.¹¹ These stories kept the gun control debate active throughout political discussion. Dodd made news when he put an undercover spy in an anti-communist group preparing to defeat a possible communist overthrow of government. With ease, his spy purchased “an 81-millimeter Russian mortar, a 15-millimeter Finnish mortar, a 2.36-millimeter, bazooka, a rifle with a grenade launcher” and various other weapons from dealers unrestricted by the government.¹²

⁹ Oscar Godbout, “Wood, Field and Stream: Gun Laws,” *The New York Times*, CXIV: 39,196 (May 18, 1965), 47.

¹⁰ Cabell Phillips, “Katzenbach Asks Gun Control Law,” *The New York Times*, CXIV: 39,198 (May 20, 1965), 47.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Dodd Says He Put a Spy in Gun Club,” *The New York Times*, CXIV: 39,242 (June 3, 1965), 41.

After the Senate hearings on his bill ended, Dodd expected to make some amendments in order to make the bill even stronger for reintroduction to the Senate Judiciary Committee. However, the National Rifle Association determined to stop the bill by using the same rhetoric that “the legislation would infringe on the rights of law-abiding citizens and still not accomplish its objective of suppressing crime.”¹³ Unfortunately, the bill was not voted on because there was a lack of quorum in the Senate Judiciary Committee. The NRA won again. Democratic Leader, Senator Russell B. Long of Louisiana, was pessimistic on the gun legislation’s effects and said, ““these bills might make it more difficult for the murderers to get guns but the man who intends to kill can always get a gun, no matter what we do.””¹⁴

In the meantime, before a third submission of the Dodd bill was proposed to the Senate Judiciary Committee, more vocal figures came out in support of Dodd. The Federal Bureau of Prisons, James V. Bennett described in a *New York Times* editorial that

pending Federal proposals to curb unrestricted gun sales are simple and straightforward. The most recent Dodd bill requires anyone who wishes to buy a pistol or revolver to do so through a licensed dealer. It would no longer be possible under such a law to...hide their purchases. The bill would ban over-the-counter sales of handguns to nonresidents of the dealer’s state, to persons under 18, to a convicted felon or to anyone not conforming to state laws governing the purchase or ownership of guns.¹⁵

¹³ “Senate Hearings On Gun Bill End,” *The New York Times*, CXIV: 39,267 (July 28, 1965), 16.

¹⁴ “Gun Bill Is Blocked By Lack Of Quorum,” *The New York Times*, CXV: 39,653 (August 18, 1966), 10.

¹⁵ James V. Bennett, “The Gun and How to Control It,” *The New York Times*, CXVI: 39,692 (September 26, 1966), 246.

This argument appeared logical and rational to Americans and reaffirmed their public opinion towards gun control. With even new supporters, Senator Dodd came back to the committee only months later and “renewed his campaign for gun control legislation, telling the Senate ‘we hold the responsibility for ending this carnage.’”¹⁶

During the hiatus on the gun control legislation, Senator Edward M. Kennedy came out against the National Rifle Association.¹⁷ He assailed the National Rifle Association for their unwillingness to help endorse the current legislation. Senator Kennedy made it clear that their assistance was not essential in the passage of this bill: “such a passage was now the will of the nation despite successful association opposition in the past years to most gun-control measures.”¹⁸ Kennedy was wrong because the National Rifle Association was too strong. Even though he thought that public opinion would grow and overtake the organization, the NRA did not falter without fighting the gun control bill and changing its legislation.

The National Rifle Association has strong ties to preventing gun control legislation even though they promote safe and responsible gun use; after all, the gun control proposals did not dramatically affect most legal gun owners. The reason that the National Rifle Association opposed gun control was grounded in their profitability as an organization: “The sad truth is that although the N.R.A. presents itself as an organization

¹⁶ “Dodd Again Asks the Senate For Gun Control Legislation,” *The New York Times*, CXVI: 39,800 (January 12, 1967), 22.

¹⁷ It interesting note that President John F. Kennedy was a member of the National Rifle Association and was listed in its obituaries as having a life membership subscription to the organization.

¹⁸ “Rifle Club Assailed By Edward Kennedy For Opposing Curbs,” *The New York Times*, CXVI: 39,881 (April 3, 1967), 18.

of rank-and-file sportsmen, it is heavily dependent upon gun manufacturers and dealers for advertising revenue in its journal and is opposing anything that might interfere with their profitable business.”¹⁹ The organization’s economic dependencies through the commerce of guns led it down a polarizing path of anti-gun control legislation.

By the fifth proposal Dodd’s bill was still not ready to be passed, and a competing bill by Senator Roman Hruska, (R) of Nebraska, had much more appeal in to the National Rifle Association because of its lack of promise to enforce its legislation, but it was dismissed early on as a reasonable solution. In response to the conditions that the NRA outlined in the Hruska Bill, Dodd decided his bill needed to be amended to overcome this harsh opposition. Because of this necessary change to pass, “most observers [felt], probably will mean no bill at all again this year, certainly no bill with teeth.”²⁰ In order to reinforce their argument on the subject, the National Rifle Association’s officials testified at the next hearing for Dodd’s bill. The organization repeated its rhetoric and message to convey their opinion: “there [is] no evidence of ‘casual relationships’ between the easy availability of guns and crime or rioting.”²¹ Stagnant debate pushed on in a pushback that main little gains on either side.

In 1967, Dodd found political disaster. The Senator from Connecticut destroyed his own career using money from campaigns and transferring it over for use into personal

¹⁹ “Gun Control Needed,” *The New York Times*, CXVI: 39,883 (April 5, 1967), 46.

²⁰ Ben A. Franklin, “Gun Control: Slow Draw on Capitol Hill,” *The New York Times*, CXVI: 39,978 (July 9, 1967), 134.

²¹ Ben A. Franklin, “Dodd Gun-Control Law Opposed By Big Rifle Group at a Hearing,” *The New York Times*, CXVI: 39,989 (July 20, 1967), 27.

accounts. The Senate censured Dodd for these actions and Dodd knew his chances for reelection were slim-to-none. The humiliating publicity caused Dodd to reconsider his bill and to actually make amendments that he believed could “overcome the opposition” and “not greatly reduce the over-all effectiveness of the bill.”²² These were considered as non-essential amendments according to Edward Kennedy. He believed it was a step down from the possibility of stronger gun control legislation.

At the same time, Democratic National Chairman, John M. Bailey, described the National Rifle Association’s “‘intent of their game is to keep...from devoting...attention to the urgent matters affecting our country.’”²³ But the National Rifle Association appealed to most members of Congress: “Representative Donald J. Irwin (D-CN) said that Dodd’s gun control bill ‘would only infringe on the rights of the sportsman’” and in regards to the abuse of firearms that “he did not think the Dodd bill ‘would accomplish that end.’”²⁴ One significant perspective came from Representative and gun owner, James H. Scheuer (D-NY). His testimony made it clear that “‘It’s insanity to believe that my civil rights are being violated by having to have a pistol permit.’”²⁵ Many different perspectives were made on Dodd’s proposed gun control legislation, and the views devolved into a mix of concerted feelings instead of organized legislation. The National

²² John Herbers, “Johnson Retreat on Gun Curbs In Effort to Win Passage of Bill,” *The New York Times*, CXVII: 40,060 (September 29, 1967), 33.

²³ Franklin, “Dodd Gun-Control Law,” 27.

²⁴ “Gun Control Bill Opposed,” *The New York Times*, CXVI: 40,000 (July 31, 1967), 18.

²⁵ Douglas Robinson, “Gun Curbs Back By A Rifle Expert,” *The New York Times*, CXVI: 40,026 (August 26, 1967), 1, 14.

Rifle Association defeated this gun control legislation, because it postponed it until the public outrage died down. By the next time the bill would be considered in 1968, two more assassinations reignited the sentiment of the Americans that they had felt five years earlier.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a preacher, a civil activist, and practitioner of non-violence. There are two reactions to the assassination of King in regards to the promotion of gun control. First, his supporters and activists, following his non-violent teachings, saw the King assassination as a sign to help spread “non-violence and racial brotherhood.”²⁶ The second reaction to the King shooting concerned the massive riots that broke out in response to King’s death. The chaos and violence that had erupted after the assassination brought “4,000 National Guard troops to Memphis” to help contain and eliminate the violence.²⁷ Because of the MLK assassination, the gun control legislation spurred right into where the NRA thought they defeated it by lack of movement and discussion.

The National Rifle Association quickly utilized Senator Dingell (D-MI) to represent their case, arguing favorably “effective and equitable legislation to control criminal misuse of firearms.”²⁸ But their true intention deviated from this statement. The legislation that Dingell supported was even significantly less strict Senator Hruska Bill

²⁶ Earl Caldwell, “Guard Called Out: Curfew is Ordered in Memphis, but Fires and Looting Erupt,” *The New York Times*, CXVII: 40,249 (April 5, 1968), 1, 24.

²⁷ “President’s Plea: On TV, He Deplores ‘Brutal’ Murder of Negro Leader,” *The New York Times*, CXVII: 40,249 (April 5, 1968), 1, 24.

²⁸ “Dingell Assails Bill Curbing the Sale of Firearms,” *The New York Times*, CXVII: 40,252 (April 8, 1968), 39.

and contained a myriad of loopholes in it. Guns could easily be sold and bought undercutting this system's requirements, which was the blatant point of the law. The news came out with a plethora of articles explaining sides and issue of the gun control debate unseen since half a decade earlier. Thomas F. Pettigrew, an Associate professor of social psychology at Harvard, argued that American society was not violent by nature but by structure "through its traditions and laws", and that changing the gun legislation in the United States can have a dramatic effect on the country as a whole:

We can begin to overcome our violent past by passage of minimal gun legislation at present before the Congress; ultimately, we need uniform gun registration and sharp restrictions on gun sales over the counter as well as through the mails. We can lower our high homicide rates and prevent the assassination of our national leaders in part by fashioning modern firearms laws consistent with modern urban society.²⁹

These sensible interpretations of gun control swarmed the country. But the public only appeared to antagonize the National Rifle Association. Because his term is not over yet as senator, Dodd frantically tried to pass his work in gun legislation, making sacrifices and thoughtless compromises with the gun lobbyists that lessened the impact of the bill. The important change made to the bill provided that states could exempt themselves from the mail order gun ban. Even with the drastic change to the bill, the National Rifle Association did not change their position on the bill. Unfortunately for the National Rifle Association, public sentiment was not dying down again like after the assassination of President Kennedy. It only took one more event and a few more amendments for public

²⁹ Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Our Society Is Violent Not by Nature But by Structure," *The New York Times*, CXVII: 40,272 (April 28, 1968), SM112.

pressure to overcome the last of the National Rifle Association's pressure on Congress to oppose the Dodd Bill.

Just after winning the California Democratic Primary, Senator Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated. A brutal description of the event spread throughout the nation, in which there were "crowds of screaming and wailing supporters crowded around him."³⁰ Less than five years after his brother, Robert Kennedy was assassinated in a horrific event that reignited the nation. The sentimental empathy for the Kennedy family struck the hearts of Americans: "'Oh God,' one bystander cried, 'It can't happen to this family again.'"³¹ Even with chaotic response to these two assassinations, the National Rifle Association would not budge on the issue; after all, they postponed legislation for five years in part because they were being blamed in some cases for the assassination itself. A public response by the president of the NRA said, people "'[are] telling me that I am responsible for the death of Senator Kennedy.'"³² In response to the constant negative press the NRA received, the NRA President made his perspective clear. He declared that no law proposed by the United States would have prevented of these assassinations from occurring. If someone wanted a weapon, a way to obtain it would be found, no matter the

³⁰ Warren Weaver, Jr., "Kennedy Shot and Gravely Wounded After Winning California Primary; Suspect Seized in Los Angeles Hotel," *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,675 (June 5, 1968), 1,32.

³¹ John G. Morris, "Kennedy Claims Victory, And Then Shots Ring Out," *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,675 (June 5, 1968), 1.

³² Peter Grose, "Rifle Group Head Disputes Need of Gun Controls," *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,678 (June 8, 1968), 16.

law. The public assailed the National Rifle Association and their position, picketing and holding signs outside their headquarters titled, “National Rifle Assassination.”³³

After the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy, a change was made in the news coverage of the gun legislation. Two sides of the debate became physically attached to political figures: the gun control to President Johnson and the opposition to the National Rifle Association. The National Rifle Association already dumbing down the bill, but internal arguments within the organization prevented consensus support for the bill.

Again, frenzied citizens proclaimed their opinions and reasonable solutions to gun violence in America. One New Yorker proclaimed that gun violence was an issue impossible to solve unless there was a systematic removal of all firearms in the country except for the police because “deadly weapons have no useful function in a truly civilized society.”³⁴ This was an interesting perspective, although unrealistic to the legislative goals within America, but it showed the fury and optimism that many Americans had of a society corrupted by gun violence. The National Rifle Association became universally known as the organization that “can so effectively impede the passage of vital legislation despite the repeated tragic instances that demonstrate its necessity.”³⁵ The transformation from law-abiding gun sportsmen into the violent happy NRA occurred. It became a difference of *you* versus *us*: “The natural right to own certain weapons for recreation and

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Alexander Markovich, “Letters to the Editor of the Times,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,678 (June 8, 1968), 30.

³⁵ James Lincoln, “Reaction to Kennedy Assassination,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,679 (June 9, 1968), E15.

sport has always been *ours* to enjoy.”³⁶ The intense boundary in gun control positioning played a crucial role in the passing of the law and developing the polarization for modern gun control. Therefore, in the wake of these assassinations, the line between pro and anti gun control became more defined. One side saw it as a constitutional right guaranteed to Americans for their protection. The other side defined guns as the violent and unproductive hobby of radicals promoting violence.

Washington D.C. felt the pressure of public opinion more than ever: “Sentiment in the Senate, apparently swayed by an out pouring of public protests over the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, began shifting significantly toward the adoption of stricter controls over the sale and possession of guns.”³⁷ Even those who opposed gun control legislation flipped sides for popular support, and members were predicting it would pass Congress, since it had an incredible amount of support from President Johnson as part of his goal in reshaping American society. In order to back away from the issue, the leaders in the Senate “took the political initiative in Congress...by urging caution toward stronger gun control legislation proposed by the Administration.” The objective of the NRA was to debate the gun control issue until the sentiment against them settled down within the country to kill off the opposition over time. The simple fact remained that even the National Rifle Association did not kill the bill, their amendments just drastically changed it before the bill eventually passed.

³⁶ Adrian Lamb, “Letters to the Editor of The Times,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,695 (June 25, 1968), 40.

³⁷ John W. Finney, “Senators Predict Strict Gun Curbs as Pressure Rises: Manfield Senses a Shift After Protests by Public Over Kennedy Murder,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,683 (June 13, 1968), 1, 21.

The National Rifle Association saw their supporters within Congress deviate from their side, and they tried to foster them back to opposition with their rhetorical argument that legislation removed rights from responsible gun owners. A sponsor of Dodd's bill and a new politician in regards to gun legislation, Senator Joseph D. Tydings (D-MD) stepped up against the National Rifle Association. Tydings saw the opportunistic gains of helping a debate whose supporters were the majority of America. Once again, news reported "“lobbyists once again are unleashing a campaign of calculated hysteria and distortion to defeat reasonable gun control legislation.””³⁸ It was a strategic move for Tydings to join the fight against the dying gun lobby and the imminent passing of the gun legislation. Because the Senate had a change in heart on the issue of gun control legislation, extremist groups launched attacks on the Senate members in regards to their next election:

Spurred by the heaviest constituent mail in several years, a number of Senators have abandoned their previous opposition to gun controls. But as Mr. Magnuson has learned, the pressures are starting to build from those who vigorously oppose tougher legislation. The protests are coming from the so-called 'gun lobby,' an amalgam of corporations, publications, organizations, sportsmen, farmers and gun lovers who want to keep the nation's firearms...free of restrictive regulation. The keystone in the lobby is the National Rifle Association, a tax-exempt organization that promotes shooting...but is not registered as a lobby but later as a 'social welfare organization.'³⁹

³⁸ John W. Finney, "Rifle Group Mounts Drive Against Gun Controls: 900,000 Members Are Urged to Counter Rising Public Pressure for Curbs," *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,685 (June 15, 1968), 1, 18.

³⁹ David R. Jones, "Pressure Building in Congress For and Against Gun Controls," *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,687 (June 17, 1968), 36.

The National Rifle Association stayed in a negative portrayal, setting the precedent for decades to come where they remain a controversial, but integral, figure in the issue of gun control.

Since the Senate censured him, Senator Dodd looked like the prototype of gun control and gained the most as Congress deviated from the NRA. He spoke in an interview admitting “I guess the gun-control business has done me some good...I certainly wouldn’t have expected anything like the compliments I’ve been getting lately.”⁴⁰ Dodd became a sort of hero to other opponents of gun violence; in return, he became an enemy of gun advocates. Even in his home state of Connecticut, he was booed and interrupted several times during a hearing in Hartford by pro-gun radicals. Calling them out, Dodd responded: “Eighty or 90 per cent of the decent people in America want this law, and your bad manners can’t prevent it. You are the gun nuts.”⁴¹ These “gun nuts” recalled similar incidents occurring in Nazi Germany and in Soviet Russia where stricter gun laws brought about an easier takeover in government and prevented citizens from protecting themselves from radical revolution; however, the proud supporters of Dodd’s cause rebutted these marks calling them “irrational fears.”⁴²

Back in Congress, a few important events significantly shaped the outcome of the gun control legislation that altered its success for gun control activists. The first situation

⁴⁰ William Borders, “Dodd Gaining Political Strength Despite Censure by the Senate,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,700 (June 30, 1968), 32.

⁴¹ William Borders, “Dodd Jeered at Hartford Gun-Control Hearing: Senator Testifies Calmly, but Explodes at ‘Gun Nuts’,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,717 (July 17, 1968), 18.

⁴² Florine D. Kopper, “Opposition to Gun Control,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,725 (July 25, 1968), 32.

was a delay in the legislative action regarding the bill. Tydings quickly remarked the potential harm that this delay may cause, describing the “vote as a ‘real defeat’ that ‘substantially weakens chances for passing responsible gun legislation this Congressional session.’”⁴³ However, the delay by key players in the Senate did not have a drastic affect on the bill’s passing. The passing of the bill appeared inevitable to the National Rifle Association. It turned into a game of how many limits the National Rifle Association could place on the bill before its passing. During a filibuster by Senator Strom Thurmond, a powerful resistance to the gun control bill was displayed. In reaction, a second round of amendments were made that “watered down” the bill even more.⁴⁴ Although these amendments to the bill were harshly criticized by many members of Congress, some even “complaining it would be ineffective in controlling interstate sales of firearms and ammunition.”⁴⁵ But Congress was tired of the issue of gun control legislation; the amendments were preferred as compromises instead of damages to the Dodd Bill. Because of the revival of public sentiment, the incessancy of the gun debate, and the drastic amendments made by the National Rifle Association, the Dodd Bill passed Congress.

⁴³ John W. Finney, “Senate Panel Delays Action On Gun Curbs Until July 9: Move Seen as Victory for Opponents of Stiff Control – Tydings, Leading Fight, Calls Vote ‘Real Defeat’,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,698 (June 28, 1968), 1, 26.

⁴⁴ “Gun Controls Bills Stalled in Senate: Thurmond Mounts Filibuster in Judiciary Committee,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,714 (July 11, 1968), 44.

⁴⁵ John W. Finney, “Gun Curb Debate Opens In Senate: Amendments Are Criticized as Lessening Control,” *The New York Times*, CXVIII: 40,775 (September 13, 1968), 33.

Finally, the Gun Control Act of 1968 passed and President Johnson signed it, declaring it a great achievement for the United States. It was enacted October 22, 1968. But the law was not as much a victory for either side as much as it was a draw. During the five years of proposals, public opinion backed up Dodd and gun enthusiasts supported the NRA in brutal fights over the issue. The spark of the issue occurred in the assassination of President Kennedy, and the media and debate slowed down only as much as the passionate sides would let them. Dodd and supporters kept resisting change on their stance while the National Rifle Association and followers promoted the same message as they had throughout their whole organization's lobbying. However, the battle was not pushed to a finish until the two assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy aroused the same sentiment again as it did with the President, except stronger. By the bill's passing, the National Rifle Association notably modified the act in several ways.

The battle between the National Rifle Association and Dodd regarding gun control fortified America's gun control debate and legislation. Through Lyndon B. Johnson's support, Dodd learned that measures taken by the President to make gun control legislation an issue are important to bringing to the table for discussion in law-making. Another key feature outlined in producing gun control legislation was the need for public support. Without giant cases of abusing guns with political assassinations and other widely reported news stories, most Americans lived unaffected by gun violence in such a ubiquitous way. Dodd and gun control reformers learned of the significance of the National Rifle Association and gun groups that were adamantly determined to get their way. Instead of being able to pass any gun control law, compromises and sacrifices need

to be made in order to pass gun control legislation. The National Rifle Association falsely believed it lost their fight against gun control legislation with the Gun Control Act of 1968. With this loss, the group transformed almost permanently into a gun lobbyist organization. The Gun Control Act of 1968 proved the difficulty of gun legislation in the United States: where one side believes they are destroying violence, another side believes they are disarming citizen's safety and rights.

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